

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9708
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPNEHAGEN
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AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
USMISSION NATO
USMISSION EC BRUSSELS
USMISSION US NEW YORK
USMISSION GENEVA

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E.O. 11652: GDS
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SUBJECT: VIEWS ON GOVERNMENT CRISIS

REF: BRUSSELS 393

1. SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR REVIEWED BELGIAN POLITICAL SCENE THIS WEEK WITH DEFENSE MINISTER PAUL VANDEN BOEYNANTS, A LEADING PERSONALITY IN THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (PSC) AND FORMER PRIME MINISTER (1966-68), AND WITH CHARLES FERDINAND NOTHOMB, PRESIDENT OF THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY. BOTH OF THESE LEADERS EXPECT EARLY ELECTIONS,
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OPPOSE ANY EFFORT TO TAKE ACTIONS IN THE CURRENT

PARLIAMENT TO EMPOWER THE NEXT PARLIAMENT TO ENACT NEW CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS, AND CLAIM TO FORESEE NO NEGATIVE IMPLICATIONS OF US INTERESTS AS RESULT OF ANY CONCEIVABLE ELECTORAL OUTCOME.
END SUMMARY

2. AT HIS BREAKFAST MEETING WITH DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS JANUARY 24, DEVOTED PRINCIPALLY TO DISCUSSION OF THE F-104 REPLACEMENT REQUIREMENT, REPORTED SEPARATELY, AMBASSADOR STRAUSZ-HUPE ASKED VANDEN BOEYNANTS FOR HIS VIEWS ON THE CURRENT GOVERNMENT CRISIS. VANDEN BOEYNANTS, POPULARLY KNOWN IN BELGIUM AS QTE VDB UNQTE, SAID HE FOUND THE CRISIS QTE IDIOTIC UNQTE. IT IS A QTE POLITICIANS' CRISIS UNQTE. IT IS NOT A NATIONAL CRISIS REFLECTING ANY DEGREE OF POPULAR ANXIETY OR DESIRE TO SEE NEW ELECTIONS HELD. AN ESSENTIALLY IDENTICAL VIEW WAS EXPRESSED TO THE AMBASSADOR BY CHARLES FERDINAND NOTHOMB, PSC PRESIDENT, ON JANUARY 23.

3. MINORITY GOVERNMENT VS EARLY ELECTIONS. NEITHER VDB NOR NOTHOMB FAVOR AN ATTEMPT TO FORM A MINORITY GOVERNMENT. NOTHOMB THOUGHT ELECTIONS MIGHT BE HELD IN EARLY MARCH.

4. CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ISSUE. NEIGHER VDB NOR NOTHOMB FAVOR ACTION TO GIVE THE NEXT PARLIAMENT AUTHORITY TO ENACT CONSTITUTUIONAL AMENDMENTS. AMENDMENTS ARE NOT DEEDED TO IMPLEMENT A NATIONALLY ACCEPTALBE REGIONALIZATION, SAID THE DEFENCE MINISTER. MAKING NEW AMENDMENTS POSSIBLE WOULD ONLY OPEN THE WAY FOR IMPRACTICAL PROPOSALS FROM EXTREMISTS.

5. ELECTORAL OUTCOME. VDB ANTICIPATES THAT ELECTIONS WOULD LEAD TO A VERY MINOR REAPPORTIONMENT OF SEATS IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, QTE ONLY ABOUT FOUR SEATS UNQTE. HE EXPECTS THE SOCIALISTS WOULD LOSE VOTES IN FLANDERS AND IN BRUSSELS BUT NOT IN
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WALLONIA. HE SEES THE LIBERAL PARTIES (PLP/PVV) BADLY SPLIT, AND LIKELY TO BE OF DIMINISHED IMPORTANCE IN THE FORMATION OF A FUTURE COALITION GOVERNMENT. NOTHOMB SEES THE CRISIS CHIEFLY SIGNIFICANT AS REFLECTING CONTROL OF THE PSB BY ITS MORE MILITANT ELEMENTS. THIS DEVELOPMENT MIGHT MAKE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FUTURE PSC/PSB COALITION GOVERNMENT MORE DIFFICULT, BUT NEVERTHELESS

NOTHOMB THINKS SUCH A COALITION IS THE ONLY CONCEIVABLE OUTCOME OF A NEW ELECTION.

6. FEERALIST/LINGUISTIC PARTIES. VDB WAS VEHEMNT IN REJECTING THE IDEA OF BRINGING ANY OF THE LANGUAGE GROUPS (FDF/RW VOLKSUNIE) INTO A FUTURE GOVERNMENT. THE GOB SHOULD QTE BURY REGIONALIZATION UNQTE BY GETTING ON WITH ITS PROPER IMPLEMENTATION.

7. IMPLICATIONS OF US INTERESTS. VDB AND NOTHOMB CLAIMED TO FORESEE NO NEGATIVE IMPLICATION FOR THE BELGIAN POSITION TOWARDS NATO, THE EC, OR THE US RESULTING FROM ANY CONCEIVABLE ELECTORAL RESULT.

8. EMBASSY COMMENT: VANDEN BOEYNANTS SEES HIMSELF AS REMAINING IN ONE OR ANOTHER KEY POSITION IN THE BELGIAN GOVERNMENT, AS REPORTED IN BRUSSELS 0457. WE ARE INCLINED TO THINK HIS SELF CONFIDENCE IS JUSTIFIED. LEBURTON'S MALADROIT ADMINISTRATION HAS ADDED LUSTER IN RETROSPECT TO VANDEN BOEYNANTS' REPUTATION FOR EFFICIENCY. NOTHOMB'S VIEWS ARE WORTH HANING BECUASE OF HIS POSITION AS PRESIDENT OF THE PSC, BUT THE ONLY SPECULATION WE HAVE HEARD ABOUT HIS POLITICAL FUTURE IS THAT HE IS UNLIKELY TO PROSPER. THE COMMENTS OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS AND NOTHOMB MAY BE TAKEN AS AUTHORITATIVE EXPRESSIONS OF THE PSC VIEW OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS.

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